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ABSTRACT

This document describes the results of a seminar convened in England and attended by representatives of national, regional, state, and local cultural organizations from France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An overview of the status of decentralization in cultural programming opens the document. Diverging views of the term "culture," however, emphasize the appropriateness of "decentralization" and lead into a description of two local cultural efforts -- one in the United Kingdom and one in the United States. An overview of the cultural policies of each of the five countries represented, discussed in relation to the concept of decentralization, is presented followed by a discussion of practical and theoretical considerations inherent in a decentralized policy. Benefiting for interaction among government agencies and private groups, such as city planners and people involved in mass media, are practical goals. The overriding theoretical concern, however, is the ability of old institutions to generate new forms and functions of cultural activity. A list of eleven questions "for the future," indicates the areas for concern discerned by the groups. A list of seminar participants concludes the document. (JH)

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CULTURAL DECENTRALISATION

REPORT OF A SEMINAR

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

COMMITTEE FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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COMMITTEE FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION
AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

CULTURAL DECENTRALISATION

REPORT OF A SEMINAR

held at
Dartington Hall, Devon, England
16 - 21 April 1972
by
Richard Findlater

Participating nations:

France, Netherlands, Sweden,
United Kingdom, United States

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CULTURAL DECENTRALISATION

On the initiative of Mr Ralph Burgard, and with the co-operation of the Dartington Hall Trustees, an international seminar took place at Dartington Hall from 16 to 21 April 1972. A list of participants is attached. It will be seen therefrom that people came to the seminar from 5 different countries: in English alphabetical order, these were France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. (All the proceedings were in the English language). It will also be seen that the participants came in part from "National Cultural Organisations" (such as the Ministries of Cultual Affairs, the national councils on the arts, arts councils etc), and in part from among these actively engaged in directing cultural activities in regions or states or in localities more or less divorced from any central (governmental or other) tutelage. Every member of the seminar spoke in his own personal capacity, and deliberately without any implied authority to commit his own agency, authority or government.

The object of the seminar was to exchange ideas between nations, and (if possible) to indicate practical lines of progress for countries concerned.

The members of the Dartington seminar were ignorant (save in the most general terms) of the earlier colloquy held under the auspices of the CCC at Arc-et-Senans, which led to a "final declaration" in which they would have been deeply interested. They also, obviously, knew nothing of the deliberations of the symposium organised by the Council of Europe at San Remo period immediately after their own discussions (26 - 29 April) (1). But they subscribed to many of the most important theses which have now become commonplaces of international discussions. For example, they were unanimous in their conviction that the conditions of existence in fully developed societies are inimical to the liberation and fulfilment of the human spirit, and that a most vigorous, even revolutionary, reaction against these conditions is essential if the basic need of human beings to shape their own lives and activity is to be preserved and developed. They all recognised that social apathy must be combated by encouraging creativity, and that national resources in money and in kind must be devoted increasingly towards this end, as a matter of accepted national cultural policy, over-riding perhaps other political considerations.

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(1) Reports of both those meetings may be obtained from the Division for Cultural Development, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

While accepting (in some cases without enthusiasm) the responsibility of governments to maintain and enhance the standards of performance of national theatres, ballets, operas etc, the participants were agreed that governments should increasingly make funds and resources available for the stimulation of non-traditional, contemporary cultural activities, stemming from the variegated impulses observable in contemporary society as it actually is (eg the Swedish "Samvarodagar" - days of being together). As regards the established institutions (opera houses, national theatres, etc), there was a general movement of opinion towards a policy of making these more open to modern artistic objectives, and to the contemporary requirements of an audience hitherto uncommitted to traditional cultural manifestations.

It was unanimously agreed that the most effective action in these directions would be for governments and national cultural organisations to make really substantial sums annually available by way of subsidies "without strings" to regional organisations, that is, to be spent in accordance with the regional organisations' own rules. There would be due financial audit, but without specific direction from the national cultural organisation as to the forms of activity to be supported. The manner in which this measure of decentralisation should be implemented would differ from country to country. For example, in the United States, devolution of the functions of funding and decision-making would in the first place be, perhaps, to the state councils on the arts; in Great Britain to the Regional Arts Associations; in Sweden a successive decentralisation to the regional offices of the 3 national institutes for concerts, theatre and exhibitions and, as a next step, the transfer of the responsibility to small cultural organisations belonging to the county councils; and elsewhere in accordance with national institutional lines of provincial demarcation - but so as always to ensure as much independence from the tutelage of the central government as was practical.

In the same way, and bearing always in mind the historically inevitable differences of political structures between one nation and another, the participants agreed that regional organisations should allocate a substantial part of their total revenues to local and district organisations, similarly "without strings".

It was recognised and accepted that action on these lines would tend to change, in a radical manner, the present objectives of national policies, perhaps away from the traditional arts. But the seminar's own main objective in seeking to define the terms of "decentralisation" necessarily implied a continuous process of socio-cultural re-evaluation (from which the traditional arts could not be exempt), towards a community-based structure.

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In conclusion, the participants agreed that further action towards an agreed policy of cultural decentralisation could best be pursued through the Council of Europe, in continuation of studies already undertaken by that body. Clearly, however, it would be useful if the views of qualified persons or agencies from the USA could be incorporated in these further studies.

The evidence of facts produced from several European countries and from the USA showed that there is growing a close co-operative relationship at the highest level between the ministries and government agencies concerned with divers aspects of cultural animation or reanimation, such as the conservation of the environment, and of the national patrimony of artistic achievements; the encouragment of sport, and of tourist attractions; the use of radio and television; the integration of scholastic and academic curricula and institutions with the cultural advancement of neighbouring communities. Participants in the Dartington seminar were unanimous in the view that co-ordination at the highest constitutional level in all these fields was an essential pre-requisite of effective decentralised cultural action.

N. Abercrombie
Chairman of the Seminar

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"Culture is not an assortment of aesthetic sugar plums for fastidious palates, but an energy of the soul. When it feeds on itself, instead of drawing nourishment from the common life of mankind, it ceases to grow, and, when it ceases to grow, it ceases to live... In the long run, it is only by its extension that, in the conditions of today, it is likely to be preserved".

R H Tawney

"Everything is culture, from clothing to books, from food to pictures; and culture is everywhere, from one end of the social scale to the other".

Roland Barthes (Times Literary Supplement 8/10/71)

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community...".

Art. 22, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

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AN UNRESTRICTED VIEW OF CULTURE

Dartington Hall is probably Britain's most remarkably and consistently successful venture in on-the-spot integration of education, agriculture, industry, culture and community life, of tradition and experiment, of private initiative and public enterprise, encouraging both local creativity and international cross-fertilisation. Welcoming the participants from the 5 participating countries, Leonard Elmhirst, founding father of the Dartington experiment, spoke of the importance of man's "sense of wonder". And this seemed to be evoked, throughout the conference, in the delegates' discovery of how much they shared in their working philosophies, whatever their differences in background and experience.

There were tensions, of course: between, for example, establishment men and radical field workers, who viewed common ground sometimes from the grass-roots and sometimes from a ministerial helicopter; or between the ready American acceptance of new technology and the lingering resistance to it elsewhere; or between France's centralising tradition and the UK's tradition of widespread voluntary engagement. Yet, this very diversity was orchestrated into a larger harmony, partly because most people at Dartington appeared to recognise, in Ralph Burgard's phrase, the importance of celebration as well as cerebration in cultural affairs, and partly because the diversity inherent in cultural decentralisation was, after all, what the seminar was about in the first place. The talk was touched at times by euphoria of frontiers - men who can see that things are going their way - or so it seems.

For even though it has been only just the last 12 years that national cultural offices - outside Britain - have become fully operational and independent already original patterns of centralised control are changing. In Britain, most of the 16 regional arts associations are less than 6 years old. In the USA, all 50 states have developed arts councils, stimulated by the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. In France, a new decentralising plan - which has been described as contradicting 250 years of French history - was launched barely 6 months before the seminar. Sweden too, has a far-reaching new plan, published in the spring of 1973, which emphasises the need for decentralisation. Holland is re-examining cultural goals, a process which will shortly be accelerated by a report from its national cultural office.

The reason for this reversal of direction, and the starting-point of discussion at Dartington, was the failure, in the last 25 years, of an earlier faith in a cultural break-through to the majority of the population. According to William J Baumol and William G Bowen, in Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, the expenditure per capita for admission

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to professional performing arts events in the USA stayed virtually constant between 1929 and 1964. In 1965 the audience for these events was estimated as 2.5% of the total population, and not even the most sanguine missionaries of the arts would contend that this percentage had changed much in the past 7 years. In France some 98% of national funding for culture was allocated to institutions that serve a tiny, educated, addicted elite. For Sweden it was said that culture belonged to a core of about 1%. Recent UNESCO figures indicate an international trend: attendance at plays and concerts is levelling off and even declining, as measured on a per capita basis. Far from expanding their social range, the arts - as conventionally defined - appear to be in danger of becoming the prerogative of an ever smaller minority of the population.

"Culture", of course, is concerned with far more than the size of the audience for the performing arts. The word is broad enough (too broad for some because of its multiplicity of meanings, while others flinch from the narrowness of its "elitist" associations) to cover most of what is valuable about the human landscape. But what other word is there? At the Beaford Centre in North Devon, they prefer to call what they do "entertainment" - and they claim to involve not 2% but 20% of the population they serve in their wide-ranging activities. While people searching for new ways to fix themselves in time, place and culture may need to venture outside the conventional limits of "the arts", it was generally agreed at Dartington that, in practice, we must do with the words we have. "Culture", said Richard Loveless, "is a way of making education and life and the arts connect. All art is therapy, in the best sense: it's good for the soul".

"Culture" seems narrow and exclusive only if you use it to denote narrow and exclusive things. At Dartington culture was seen as broad as life itself: in culture lay solutions for educational problems, a way of changing the school environment, a reconciliation of racial and social tensions, a cure for alienation in the suburbs of a Dutch city or an American new town. Culture could be used to help an underprivileged, backward area (like the Massif Central). Anthony Keller cited Bergson: "The function of art is to return us to ourselves". Adrian van der Staay urged administrators and activists alike to look outside the culture in which they have been reared into the other culture, the world of the majority.

As art ceases to be regarded, in John Lane's phrase, as "cultural icing", and comes to be seen as a main ingredient of the everyday diet, cultural agencies will surely play a greater role in governmental planning at national, regional and local levels. Ezra Pound once said: "Artists are the antennae of the race". The first tremors of a new trend in the coming decade were what gave the Dartington Seminar, in my view, a particular sense of relevance, even of urgency.

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TWO DECENTRALISED EXPERIMENTS

Before describing what the five national cultural offices appear to be thinking about cultural decentralisation in general, I should like to indicate what it can mean in particular - by looking briefly at two experiments reported on at Dartington: the Beaford Centre in England and the New Place in America. Theory is one thing, practice quite another, and these two admirable enterprises present a good vision of what we ought to be aiming at. Both depend on the personalities and philosophies of their directors; they differ vastly, not only from each other, but from other decentralised enterprises in their countries. Yet the reports on both were especially valuable ingredients of the seminar because they reminded us - in human detail and with emotional force - what decentralisation is about, what "culture" can mean and be taken to mean. Both, incidentally, were started - and both continue - without direct help from their national cultural offices.

The Beaford Centre was established in a North Devon village in 1966 by a private charitable foundation, the Dartington Trust, as an agency of regional regeneration. John Lane, a former lecturer in art, is its director. At the same time, the Trust started a glass factory in a neighbouring town, with the aim of revitalising the area economically as well as culturally. Beaford, which Lane described as "one of the most decentralised institutions in Britain," serves a rural area of about 1,000 square miles, with a scattered population of some 120,000. The biggest town has 16,000 people. The region is not only somewhat isolated but also backward, designated by the government as a development-area for industry (more colloquially, a depressed area), with a high exodus-rate particularly among the young. There is only one theatre-cum-concert hall.

Beaford Centre uses some 60 different venues - mainly churches, pubs, village halls, community centres and other "natural centres of social activity". For instance, the centre's travelling theatre group, the Orchard, has no permanent stage, but performs in old people's homes, hospitals, primary schools, factories, women's institutes and remote village halls, with talks, readings, demonstrations and entertainments in addition to mounting full-scale plays in the larger towns with its own portable props, scenery, lighting and tiered seating. Speaking of the Orchard, John Lane does not talk about art. The Orchard actors, he says, are "concerned to satisfy profound human needs: the need for laughter, the need for company, the need to be stimulated and cheered up. Their task is to animate - just that and nothing more".

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Beaford "animates" the region in many different ways. Besides sponsoring more traditional forms of small-scale touring - such as dancers from the Royal Ballet or a concert by part of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra - the centre encourages brass band concerts, readings by regional writers, talent contests, film shows, jazz sessions, all-day village parties for children, chamber music and folk music recitals, and local festivals that keep village tradition alive. The centre runs day and evening classes for adults, Saturday morning classes for children, holiday and residential courses. Subjects include lace, jewelry and wine-making, flower arrangment, painting, play reading and folk dancing. Such activities, John Lane says, "move across the well guarded frontiers dividing art and entertainment, education and community development".

To achieve all this, the Beaford Centre works through a variety of channels and sponsors: the county council, the region's university (drama department, extra-mural department and institute of education), the local technical college, the Workers Educational Association, and the regional arts association. Part of the Beaford budget is paid by the Devon County Council and 17 district councils, a collective contribution that has risen in 5 years from under £300 to over £7,000. The South-Western Arts Association pays 41% of the Beaford bill, with £15,000; and the lion's share is still provided by Dartington, with £18,600 or 49%. At a current cost of under £41,000 the Beaford Centre is demonstrating that art, even if you don't care to call it that, can have, in John Lane's words, "important social consequences ... no less significant for the well-being of a community than those which might be expected from other, more familiar forms of social welfare".

The New Place is situated in a Tampa, Florida, neighbourhood with "a unique cultural mix" - ie, some 46% black and 37% Latin (Mexican and Puerto Rican). This "urban arts settlement" is in a tough quarter where white middle-class youngsters are forbidden to go by their parents - though many break the rule to visit the New Place - and it works among people who, its founder claims, have been "ignored and neglected for years by the city and the state". The venture began in a windowless, ruined garage, with no grants from central or regional agencies, with little capital, indeed, beyond the determination of Richard Loveless, an assistant professor of art education at the local university.

Each week the New Place serves about 2,000 children and young people (ages 3 to 30, says the brochure), with the help of up to 70 unpaid helpers, many of them staff and students from the university. It has spread from the garage (now repaired) to an adjacent church and house with what sounds, to European ears, like a treasury of technology. It has an annual budget of about $75,000, all of it from non-arts agencies, including the US Office of Education, a local private foundation, and the United Methodist Church. The budget and attendance rate are bigger than those of

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any other arts project in the area; yet Ralph Burgard reported that when he visited Tampa (population 300,000) recently, he found that the New Place was generally unknown in the worlds of the theatre people and music people.

The New Place presents conventional spectator events - concerts, plays, films, poetry readings - but these are not seen to be its most important function. Its director believes in starting from the experience of the people rather than with the imported event and the expectation of experience, with its implicit assumptions about what the spectator ought to feel. Since an essential part of their everyday experience is rooted in technology, children have been encouraged, for instance, to tape-record the reminiscences and reflections of their elders. If insights into the social background of the community that are unavailable in print are a by-product of such work, so much the better. Four-year-olds help to make films about local life and are allowed a good deal of creative freedom. One teenage group wanted to remake "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" after seeing the film on TV because, they said, it was too violent. Their own version turned into what was described as a film about "the different aspects of love in our society". This group had dropped out on drugs the previous year. Now they come back to the New Place with a new enthusiasm, religion, and asked to make a film about the Second Coming. This went ahead - with a caveat about community communication: "We always stress the importance of multiplicity of meaning. Whatever they do, they should try to speak on different levels to different kinds of people".

Not only tape-recorders, hand-held movie cameras and home projectors abound at the New Place. Loveless plans to draw on an armoury of lasers, microwave systems, holograms, quadrophonic sound systems and other equipment. The New Place has for instance, a "composing laboratory", where with the help of electric pianos, amplifiers, and borrowed computer time young enthusiasts work out the chance compositions of aleatoric music from mathematical formulae, roulette sequences, or stock market reports. One fourteen-year-old Mexican boy picked up an old wire recorder from a junk yard, converted it to stereo, recorded traffic noise on the nearby highway, combined this with selections from Ravi Shankar and other sources, and produced a piece, Loveless reported, that was acclaimed by a visiting composer in a rather higher age group as one of the most exciting pieces of music in his recent experience. The New Place's latest acquisition is "a complete colour TV studio", acquired at bargain rates with a little help from their friends at the local TV station.

Richard Loveless insists that he is not exalting technology, but trying to "create some kind of creative tension among tradition, cultural ideas and new technological ideas ... By ignoring technology, we are ignoring the life process itself".

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It is significant that the great rocket base of Cape Canaveral is not far away: that miraculous moon technology is part of the Tampa background and may account in part for the technical expertise of the city's children as they broadcast their tapes on the local radio and transmit their films on local television. In a comparative study Loveless is writing, he calls the New Place an "Urban Media Exploration and Communications Centre and Teacher Training Laboratory", but he describes it more reassuringly (and more accurately?) in conversation: "the only place in the city where blacks, Mexican and white children can meet without fighting". "It's a nice place to be; it's warm and human and loving". The New Place believes in the importance of response.

It would seem to me that quick (if not intent) popular response, the salient characteristic of both these experimental programmes, is probably indispensable to any recipe for cultural decentralisation. This may sound obvious; but it was, after all, the failure of just such a response that punctured the bubble of the cultural "boom" of the 1960s, notably in the United States and in France. Just as dogmatic application of doctrinaire formulae then raised too many expectations and fulfilled too few so now the enthusiasts for decentralisation will face similar dangers if they embrace it uncritically as a panacea policy, to be imposed from above. The Beaford Centre and New Place experiments depend largely on the drive, talent and imagination of their directors. This is not to say that their achievements are merely happy accidents of time, place and person: but that they are not at all easy to duplicate everywhere, whatever the funds available. What they provide is examples of good work, of something to shoot for. It is as goals - as evidence of what is possible - that they can stimulate those struggling with the problems of decentralisating culture. And before going on to examine some of those problems, let us look at what the countries represented at Dartington are contemplating at the moment.

FIVE COUNTRIES: THE PRESENT PATTERN

France:

Decentralisation is one of the explicit cultural objectives of the Sixth Plan, announced in 1971, which was praised by Nigel Abercrombie at Dartington as "far ahead of anything that exists and works, in other countries, in penetration of concept and width of grasp". Decentralisation is to be achieved with the help of an advisory body called the National Council for Cultural Development, which consists of persons picked by the Minister for Cultural Affairs from all fields of national life with the exception of the civil service. A special pump-priming fund of 10 million francs, (Fonds d'Intervention Culturelle), has been created to finance, on a 50/50 matching basis, experimental projects for a maximum period of 2 years. Priority goes to

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projects outside Paris, especially those involving private as well as public agencies and more than one ministry. This is an attempt to counteract not only excessive centralisation but mutual ministerial insulation and the neglect of non-governmental sources of patronage. Significantly, this fund is not allocated by the Minister for Cultural Affairs, but by an inter-ministerial committee, which meets twice a year and is responsible to the Prime Minister.

In each of the 21 regions, cultural action associations financed and controlled by the ministry are being created; so far 3 exist. Each region already has an advisory committee, modelled on the structure of the central ministry. These new fledged creations are to be given more power in due course, and will become the main administrative links with Paris. To date, there is no intermediary between local or regional activities and the ministry but as the new regional associations develop, it is proposed that they will become the link with the organisations in their terrain. The ministry also keeps a cultural representative in each region as liaison with the prefet, is appointing regional music organisers for co-ordination and animation, and has set a target of 20 regional orchestras for financial and technical support. Local advisers on the plastic arts are also recruited by Paris. Theatrical life in the provinces is reinforced by 20 companies and centres established with state help since 1945, and subsidised on the condition that each organisation make at least 3 tours of its region every year. With commendable democracy, all regions, it seems, are to be treated as equal, however unequal their resources, initiative, and appetites.

The internationally famous experiment of the Maisons de la Culture - those ambitious centres intended to present multi-arts programmes to a majority public - is considered after 9 years, to have failed to reach a majority public. Only 9 of the scheduled 20 have been built and work successfully at full capacity. At a disproportionately high cost, 3 Maisons have achieved a small increase in the middle-class audience for culture, while barely touching the working class, who provided less than 5% of the audience in a 1967-68 survey. Cheaper, less elaborate Maisons, with wider social functions, are now planned and these will work in collaboration with the local population and other ministries. The Maison at Yerres, for instance, which includes a youth centre, library, sports centre, arts workshop and a 1,000 place school, is run with the help of the Ministeries of Education, Youth and Sport, and Social Welfare, as well as the local authority. The 9 existing Maisons have been built and maintained on a 50/50 matching basis by the local authority and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which has the last word on their budgets and choice of directors.

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In addition to the new style Maisons, there are to be centres of cultural animation - 20 are already in existence or on the way - with an emphasis not on the building but on the activity. Teams of artists, working ad hoc and sometimes without permanent premises, will attempt to involve a broad section of the public in participatory culture. There are, moreover, 1,300 Maisons de Jeunesse (run by the Ministry of youth and Sport), most of which include an arts workshop as well as the traditional sporting and recreational facilities; and a large number of municipal centres, run and financed by local authorities, of widely varying range, effectiveness and facilities, but these appear to play no very significant part in the regenerative schemes of the national planners.

In spite of its departures from French tradition and its imaginative redrafting of the lines of communication and command, this pattern may still seem a long way from decentralisation in practice: Paris seems to be in firm control almost everywhere that matters. Yet encouragement of local initiative and recruitment of patronage outside the central government are so new in France that some guidance by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs seems, for some time, to be indispensable.

It will be interesting to see, in the coming decade, how the French solve the problem of achieving decentralised growth, freedom and co-ordination, without either maintaining too strict a Parisian control or destroying the authority of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, still, after all, only 14 years old as an autonomous state agency. The seeds are just being planted; it would be foolish to expect a harvest over night.

Sweden

Like the French, the Swedes have mingled strong traditions of centralised practice with democratic theory, and in Sweden too, both the philosophical justification and the social need for decentralisation have been increasingly recognised at the centre. The current system is, as in France, of recent origin. It was only in 1963 that the Department of Cultural Affairs was established inside the Swedish Ministry of Education. In view of its place in the governmental framework, it is not surprising that educational responsibilities loom in its activities, more so than with other national cultural offices represented at Dartington. Of 2 million Swedes taking part in the voluntary adult educational system in a year, about 600,000 were engaged in cultural activities of some kind, which works out at an impressive 8% of the population. The department's range is vast: arts education, youth work, museums, libraries, films, radio and television. Among the organisations under its umbrella are the Central Office of National Antiquities, the Swedish Film Institute, the National Archives, the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, the Royal Library and the Royal Academies of Music and the Fine Arts. All are situated in Stockholm.

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But the department's satellites also include the Theatre and Music Council, which supervises the work of 2 independent bodies concerned with disseminating the performing arts outside the capital. These are the National Theatre Centre, which dates from the 1930s and tours its permanent company throughout Sweden, and the Foundation for Nationwide Concerts, which was established in 1968 to develop concerts for children in school (this takes most of its budget) and for adults in any serviceable place outside the concert halls. It co-operates with regional and local authorities, and promotes musical education and appreciation on a broad scale as well. Although the government appoints representatives to the boards of both institutions, the majority are nominated by other public bodies and professional associations in Stockholm. Another agency of the National Cultural Office, the Commission on Museums and Exhibitions, established in 1965, supervises Swedish Travelling Exhibitions, an enterprise that tours exhibitions of various kinds throughout the country.

Touring from the centre has appeared to be, until now, the main form of decentralisation in Sweden. Regional and local initiative has been relatively weak and scattered, and the impetus has come, as a rule, from Stockholm, using the system of matching grants. The state, for instance, pays half the costs of 16 municipal theatres and orchestras outside Stockholm. Until recently, the 23 County Councils have shown little concern for cultural activities in the wider sense, and have mainly limited their interest to museums, libraries and further education. Locally, multi-arts programmes - of varying scale and kind - have sometimes been sponsored by the "People's Houses", which sprang out of the Swedish labour and trade union movement from the late 19th century onwards. There are now some 800 of these places. Apart from these, there has been a sudden upsurge in the past few years of municipal cultural committees. In 1968 only about 7% of Swedish municipalities had such entities, but now the figure is around half. Their scope appears to be restricted so for, with libraries as the principal investment (and libraries are viewed, it seems, as educational rather than cultural agencies).

Provincial government, too, is being restructured. In Sweden, as elsewhere, there has been a steady reduction in the number of local units, from 2,000 in 1960 to around 270 by the mid-1970s. This may appear to be quite the opposite of decentralisation. But it is arguable that the bigger the authority, the more it will have to spend in cash and services on culture and creative activity - with matching grants from the state, of course.

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Last spring a far-reaching report which seeks to provide for extensive decentralisation was published for general discussion and submission to the government by the National Council of Cultural Affairs, an independent advisory body attached to the ministry. (An English summary has been published). Looking to the future, the report proposes that "the overriding goal of cultural policy is to contribute to the creation of a better social environment and of greater social equality", and that decentralisation of activities and decision-making is indispensable to realising that goal. Touring, the report recognises, is not enough; the country needs more regional institutions, supported by more state aid. The report urges the establishment of joint committees at local and regional levels that would co-ordinate the functions outside Stockholm of various associations and organisations; it recommends more cultural committees, in communities and county councils, with political autonomy; it proposes specifically an extension of authority from the National Theatre Centre and the Foundation for Nationwide Concerts to regional agencies; and it welcomes the coming regionalisation of television and radio as a way of promoting decentralisation and renewed cultural vitality throughout Sweden.

The Swedish report puts a great deal of faith in the regenerative powers of committees, the importance of representational (rather than individual) membership, and the necessity of reshaping things from above. The details of decentralisation appear, moreover, less specific than those of the French plan. Yet one has to remember once again, that this is only the beginning of the story. Not the least encouraging aspect of the Swedish scene, as glimpsed at Dartington, is what Carl-Erick Virdebrant described as the eagerness to "promote experimental attitudes".

The Netherlands

Dutch cultural activity is centrally administered and subsidised by a division of a government office, the Directors of Cultural Affairs, in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Recreation and Social Welfare. Through another directorate in the same ministry, control is exercised over adult education, youth work, radio and TV and public libraries. But in Holland, private activity and enterprise play a greater role than in France or Sweden. For instance, much of the national cultural office's research is farmed out to a private organisation, the Boekman Foundation, and a good deal of the state's investment in culture is channelled through non-governmental bodies. Moreover, regional and local authorities have relatively wide freedom in cultural spending. Apart from subsidies to local and regional arts institutions, eg symphonies and theatres, the local authorities receive no direct grants from the state, but are free to allocate as they wish the large slice of revenue from taxes that the government returns to them every year.

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At the top, the Director-General is advised by an Arts Council, which began as a private organisation in 1948. Its 84 members, appointed by the Minister, are mostly artists: they meet only once or twice a year. The Council's several sub-committees - one each for theatre, dance, literature, opera, music, film, and one for co-ordination - meet every month. At the regional level, each of the 11 provincial governments has its own arts council, each of which has, in turn, a sub-committee for every main art form. These may co-opt individual artists and others, so that a council's operations may involve as many as 200 people. Some act purely in an advisory capacity, as does the central council. In some other cases, as in North Holland, the regional council may take a more active role in sponsoring the performing arts. The ministry contributes about 25% of the regional councils' administrative costs, but nothing directly to their cultural budgets. Inside the provinces the larger municipalities also have arts councils of their own, to give advice. In a year local and regional authorities may collectively spend more on cultural activities than the ministry, capital grants apart. There are, as yet, few major arts centres in Holland. However, there are 52 smaller centres throughout the country where participation in the arts by both children and adults is encouraged. Most are associated with the Assembly for the Development of Creativity, a national organisation that aims at promoting self-fulfillment through self-expression. About 40% of its budget comes from fees charged for classes, 30% from local authorities, and the remaining 30% is paid by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, to reimburse professional artist instructors engaged by the local centres.

The national music schools are subsidised on a different basis. Most of the subsidies come from the municipal authorities, with a little help from the provinces. The state contributes only 5% of the total. The ministry also subsidises other amateur activities through the national associations of the various art forms. Last year, for instance, it invested in amateur music by contributing to a national brass band association, and a national choral association. Subsidies are given on approximately a 50/50 basis. In the realm of the professional arts, state subsidies to local and regional organisations are usually made on condition that they make their work available in towns and areas outside the major cities.

On paper, at least, the pattern of Dutch cultural organisation looks already well and truly decentralised. But, it was pointed out at Dartington that the great difficulty is that the activities and goals of the local and regional authorities and those of the central government are not sufficiently co-ordinated The vitality of decentralised activity (as distinct from the range of decentralised structure) is still patchy, and it is generally restricted, as in other countries, to the spectator culture of an educated elite. Part of the ministry's national

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role has been, and is likely to remain for some time, the attempt to guarantee, regionally and locally, standards of quality as well as participation. Far from accepting the status quo, however, the ministry seems eager to explore the development of greater decentralisation in cultural policy and practice. This searching spirit is shown by the ministry's publication last summer of a report on cultural goals and the function of art in society, that was intended to stimulate discussion in parliament and the public so that the targets may be more clearly defined before the money - and the people - are aimed in their direction.

United States

The tradition of private sponsorship of the arts (encouraged by tax concessions unmatched in Europe) is so deep-rooted in America that central and regional governmental investment in culture has only recently begun and still lags behind private aid. Now that a national cultural office is established, the tradition of independence from Washington - illustrated by the rule that most federal cultural grants may not exceed 50% of a given artistic project - is so strong that regionalisation, if not yet decentralisation, of governmental aid is quickly spreading.

At the centre is the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Both the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities are divisions of the National Foundation for the Arts and the Humanities, an independent agency created in 1965 and responsible to the President, who appoints the Chairman of both endowments. In practice, both endowments are virtually autonomous, and both chairmen report directly to the President. The President also appoints a 26 member central advisory and grant reviewing board, the National Council on the Arts with 9 advisory panels of artists and arts administrators. The National Council is chaired by the Chairman of the NEA, who has to listen but not obey.

The NEA gets the bulk of the official federal cultural budget. Of the $29,750,000 available for the year ending 30 June 1972, $20,750,000 was allocated, under the National Programmes Fund section, for matching grants to cultural institutions throughout the country; $3,500,000 was set aside to match private gifts received by the NEA itself; and another $5,500,000 went to the 55 state and territorial arts councils. Each state council could, in 1972, claim up to $101,000, if matched on a 50/50 basis with funds either voted by state legislatures or raised from private sources, including ticket sales.

Apart from the financial report that state arts councils must submit to Washington each year, the NEA imposes few restrictions on the money allocated for state use. The main ones are that the grant is not to be spent on the council's administration; that union scales and rules are to be observed; and that there be no discrimination of race, colour or religion in the projects supported. Most of the state councils are run by a board of private individuals appointed by the state governor; they vary widely in influence and state financial support.

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At the local level, there are over 650 community arts councils, including both arts councils (usually private) and arts commissions (usually public). Only 150 of these have full-time directors. Over a third are "commissions", appointed by the mayor or the county commissioner, and these are primarily concerned with the voluntary improvement of the urban scene and civic amenities. They receive little if any official subsidy. The remainder are non-profit associations, privately incorporated, depending heavily on annual appeals to private benefactors, and usually run by a mixture of community representatives and representatives from participating arts organisations. In addition, there are many arts associations and centres that present multi-arts programmes.

In the cities, community or neighbourhood arts workshops are prevalent. Some, organised by and for minority groups, stress identification with and participation in minority cultures. This latter group is eligible to receive aid from the NEA's Expansion Arts Programme, which spent $1,132,000 in the year ending 30 June 1972. This programme, a main impulse toward decentralisation, gives help to professionally directed community groups that are engaged in producing original and promising works of art or creating "innovative art-forms and arts-related activities", or achieving educational and social goals through the arts, or developing new ways to assimilate new and established art-forms, or promoting cross-cultural exchange and working for groups "insulated from the cultural mainstream".

More conventionally, the NEA also helps to promote the performing and visual arts. (About 80% of the concert bookings today are made by colleges and universities.)

Outside the NEA, central aid also comes from a number of federal agencies: Housing and Urban Development, the State Department, the Department of Interior, and the Office of Education. Municipal aid to culture is still generally restricted to supporting museums and more recently symphony orchestras. The general movement of the middle and upper income bracket populations away from city centres, resulting in lower civic tax revenues, means that a major extension of local government aid to cultural groups seems improbable in the near future. But cultural sponsorship by county authorities, which have recently shown some readiness to experiment, may increase in the next decade. Generally, the bulk of public and private funds, at central, regional and local levels, is invested in professional, spectator culture. The overall cultural budget is inadequate for new building and long-term planning. In governmental and administrative terms, decentralisation below the state level is very patchy; some state councils encourage community arts councils, others ignore them; some cities have arts associations and neighbourhood workshops, others have little or nothing. Moreover, although

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there has been a rapid and remarkable extension of cultural activity among minority groups, it has not been accompanied, as yet, by any comparable phenomenon among the blue-collar majority. But Clark Mitze could modestly admit at Dartington, "we're still in the process of learning how to do it", one may add that, considering America's size and variety, what has been done already is an impressive achievement.

United Kingdom

The oldest and most complex of cultural organisations appears to combine local freedom and initiative to a greater degree than is the case elsewhere in Europe. Private subsidy to the arts is small compared with the USA, and the state pays the lion's share of the nation's cultural bill through the Arts Council of Great Britain. As in the USA, this national cultural office is not a ministry but an independent body. Its annual grant comes from the government. The council's policy, membership and choice of chief executive are subject to the scrutiny of a Minister with special responsibility for the arts - currently, the Paymaster-General, who also is responsible for museums and libraries, although these are largely run by local authorities and lie outside the Arts Council's scope. In contrast to France, Sweden and Holland, Britain's national cultural office has no direct official concern with films (other than specialised films about art and artists), town planning and conservation, adult education or TV and radio. Established by Royal Charter in 1946, the Arts Council developed out of a wartime improvisation to meet a national need summed up in its original title, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. The council's principal functions still lie inside the traditional fields indicated by its early title, officially distinct from the encouragement of education, therapy and social work.

The council spends two-thirds of its funds outside London, in a variety of ways. It subsidises touring by major institutions such as the National Theatre and the Royal Ballet, operating from the centre, and by lesser groups working on a smaller scale but with a wider circuit. The council itself organises touring art exhibitions, the only field in which it works directly as a supplier: in the last 16 years there have been over 350 of them. It also subsidises 50 of the country's 150 annual arts festivals. During the past decade, moreover, it has played an important role, locally and regionally, in the movement to bring the arts to school children and young people and to bring them to the arts, notably by subsidising specialised professional groups attached to local theatres. More important, perhaps, than its support for touring or educational work is the council's direct aid, of various kinds, to dramatists, novelists, designers, composers, painters, directors and producers and its direct grants to local and regional organisations throughout the country - 4 symphony orchestras, 14 regional arts associations, some 20 art galleries,

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and 60 repertory theatres. In addition to subsidising their operations, it provides financial support for housing requirements of arts institutions at the maximum overall rate of some £500,000 per year. To date the council has firmly refused to invest directly in amateur activity, although it supports organisations that do. There are big and obvious gaps in the cultural map of Britain, but the uneven pattern has been shaped by the incidence and intensity of local enterprise.

While giving advice and encouragement to all who will listen, the council has not since its early days tried to impose its own views on an institution, organisation, district or town. Just as the council prizes its own independence from the government, so it respects the freedom of local authorities - including their freedom to ignore the claims of culture. The council may attempt to get a town or county hall to invest in a project, if it has not already done so, but such support is not made a condition of central aid to local cultural enterprise and no fixed share or matching grant is required. Municipal aid may be, as with Salisbury Playhouse, for instance, as little as 3% of the council's allocation. (Municipal patronage of culture, incidentally, was virtually non-existent before 1939, but has grown with relative rapidity in the past 25 years. Some 50% of local authorities in England and Wales, however, still give nothing at all to the arts.) State aid, in short, has been indispensable to the extension and survival of cultural activity outside London, and decentralised enterprise would shut down tomorrow without it and the assurance of its continuation.

It might be said that regionalisation in Great Britain began in 1946, with the establishment of Scottish and Welsh committees, now elevated to the status of arts councils. The Chairman of both serve on the main council and their annual subsidy is allocated from the council's grant; but although London decides how much they will get, Edinburgh and Cardiff are allowed to spend the money as they wish. Yet Scotland and Wales are, after all, not so much regions as countries with separate national histories and identities. It is only in the last 5 years that a true system of regional arts associations has spread in England, although the oldest, the South-Western, was established in 1956, while the Northern Arts Association - cited by the Arts Council as a "prototype of patronage" - dates from 1961. There are now 14 of these regional associations in England (with 2 in formation) and 2 in Wales.

The regions that these associations serve usually represent a number of counties, but their boundaries do not necessarily coincide with county divisions. For the most part the associations depend upon a grouping of empirical convenience. They are funded by a combination of grants from the Arts Council, local authorities and private trusts, companies and individuals. Like the Arts Council, they are public bodies independent of the government,

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and are generally also independent, grants apart, of the Arts Council (although a senior council officer acts as a co-ordinator and counsellor). The associations are usually controlled by an elected executive committee, representing local interests of all kinds. In addition to advising on and co-ordinating theatrical productions, exhibitions, festivals, concerts, and readings in their regions, they give awards to artists and writers, raise funds, publish newsletters and calendars of events, attempt to publicise cultural activities through press, radio and TV, subsidise the audience's attendance at events by cut-price voucher schemes and bus subsidies. Inevitably the associations vary widely in their initiative, influence, and size; but all are necessarily restricted by their budgets, (ranging from £40,000 to £270,000 per annum) by the fact that the key institutions in their areas are accustomed to look directly to London for help, and by their relative novelty in the organisational field.

This means that they have to endure widespread suspicion. They are, it seems, only on the threshold of their future role in cultural life. Arts council aid to them tripled between 1970 and 1972 to about £700,000. But in the next decade it seems likely that responsibility for local arts and institutions will be transferred increasingly to them and that they might, as Nigel Abercrombie suggested, serve as the funnel for the flow of central government and private agency funds to traditional recipients of subsidy as well as to public libraries, conservation agencies, and other bodies. This process is one of regionalisation, rather than decentralisation. The latter course is warmly favoured by the current Minister responsible for the arts, but its implementation surely presents huge obstacles.

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF DECENTRALISATION

Decentralisation may indeed be the wave of the future, but at Dartington it was generally agreed that national cultural agencies would not wither away, and are, in fact, still indispensable. The major arts institutions in every country are still fighting hard to get national aid that is, as a rule, far below the levels they consider to be adequate, and they have learned as a consequence the political arts of pressure and persuasion, with varying success. At the same time, there appears to be a general failure of collaboration, on any kind of formal basis, among agencies working in the cultural field. Although the new Swedish plan stresses the importance of inter-departmental co-operation and although ad hoc liaison on a personal basis is frequent in other countries, France was the only nation represented at Dartington that is attempting a systematic, formal process of liaison and consultation at the national governmental level. Ralph Burgard emphasised that such ministerial collaboration is essential if one of the ultimate goals of decentralisation is to be achieved: namely, the integration of aesthetic and creative concerns into all governmental planning processes. It also allows for a more efficient investment of national funds.

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Collaboration is, not surprisingly, most common in the field of education, notably in Sweden, where the national cultural office is a department of the Ministry of Education. In 1971, the US Office of Education allocated to the National Endowment for the Arts $1,000,000 for the artists in schools programme. But apart from this there is not much active partnership in the USA between central cultural and educational offices. Collaboration is generally more noticeable, as in Britain, at the regional and local levels, where schools, universities and further education centres establish working links in various ways with arts institutions, associations and companies. Clearly, participatory programmes involving young people (in which decentralised organisations are increasingly engaged), for example, demand greater funds than may be hoped for in the immediate future from any national cultural office. Some support may reasonably be expected to come, in part, from a nation's education budget. Cultural projects of this sort are valuable not only in themselves, and as part of the educational process, but they may also, as Anthony Keller pointed out, help to counter the mounting disaffection of the young with the educational system itself - a resistance movement which is perhaps more evident in the USA than in Europe, but which seems likely to follow other American trends across the Atlantic.

Cultural penetration of the school system faces many difficulties. In France, there is a pedagogic tradition with little room hitherto for literary artistic and musical self-expression. In Britain, intense concentration of interest and time on examination syllabi from the age of 13 replaces the earlier cultural activities of an increasing proportion of school children. There has no agreement at Dartington on the best methods of infusing education with culture and the arts. The artists in schools policy, as pursued on the American scale, was regarded with some scepticism among the Swedes, for instance, who argued that if artists were useful at all, it was in training teachers rather than in teaching pupils. Anthony Keller, an ardent champion of the programme, insisted that the only way for an artist to be effective in teacher training was to work in the classroom first. Adrian van der Staay said that the important thing was not that the artist should be regarded as a representative of the arts, but that he should stimulate the creative activity and subjective responses of the pupils. Yet although the warmest advocacy for the arts as an educational force came from the USA, one American, Clark Mitze, warned against the tendancy to think of such programmes as panaceas, and another American, Micheal Straight, pointed out the dangers of the current notion that "the artist is he who follows the life style of the artist".

Another fruitful field of inter-agency collaboration is in the control of the urban environment and town planning - at least potentially. But in Holland, Sweden and Britain the national cultural office plays no active role in planning and townscaping which is largely a regional and municipal responsibility, and, at

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the governmental level, concerns other agencies. New towns, like many old towns, are only beginning to realise their lack of cultural amenities: in Britain, for instance, a fraction of their budget is now earmarked for possible cultural development, and the Arts Council's former Chief Regional Officer maintained an unofficial working liaison with their social development officers. In the USA, by law, 1% of the cost of federal public buildings may be devoted to works of art (though this is not mandatory and is often ignored), while at the local level a few cities - led by Philadelphia - apply a similar law with more immediate effect. Some private developers, working with housing and development corporations in new towns and neighbourhood renewal, employ arts consultants in making provision for community life. But neither the NEA nor the state arts councils have any voice in local planning.

In France, the importance of redirecting cultural policy in the framework of town and county planning has long been recognised. The Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with other agencies, intervenes more directly than do national cultural offices elsewhere. For instance, it has - with the Ministry of Public Works and local bodies - defined protected urban zones inside some 40 cities and towns for purposes of preservation. To each of 5 new towns being built outside Paris, the ministry has delegated a consultant, with an annual fund of some 200,000 francs, to advise on design and cultural facilities. In one of these towns, the ministry has helped to establish a school of architecture with the outward-looking policy of involving newcomers in the design of their own environment. Indeed, the city itself, as Augustin Girard suggested, should be regarded as the object of cultural work, and ministry policy is directed to that goal.

Theo van Velsen pointed out that architects and planners tend to resist the collaboration of the artist, and to view his role as no more than the decoration of buildings that need no ornament - and that since, in Holland at least, artists have so little experience in this field they often reinforce such prejudices on the rare occasions when they are involved. The collaboration of the public with architects and planners is an even less familiar process, although experiments in democratic participation are now being made in Sweden, for instance. Folke Edwards described an interesting venture at his Gothenborg centre, where, in an attempt to broaden the social base of cultural life, people were given the opportunity of choosing alternative ways of converting its library, in discussion with an artist brought in for that purpose. The consultations took several months, but Edwards claimed the procedure paid off in a fresh sense of identification and participation.

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New towns, in particular, offer unusual opportunities to experiment - socially, aesthetically, architecturally - that depend upon inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination. These opportunities have yet to be firmly grasped outside France. Clearly, the vitality of cultural decentralisation is closely linked to effective control over the urban and suburban environment and the surrounding countryside. American experience suggests that if such control is to serve public good rather than private profit, central or at least regional regulation will be required.

A much larger question of inter-agency collaboration concerns the mass media. Among the most potent influence for centralisation and standardisation in every country are the film and television industries, which reach as much as 98% of the public, compared with the 2% who attend the performing arts. The effect of film and television, with their emphasis on the value of individual, local and regional differences, is widely regarded as a prime incentive to cultural decentralisation, and yet they also appear to be one of the prime obstacles to the achievement of that goal. But no national cultural office, as the Dartington seminar made clear, has more than peripheral contact with the headquarters of these industries. The French plan points out the importance of countering their negative influence, but it was not clear at Dartington how this was to be done.

Take the cinema first. In each of the 5 countries represented at Dartington there are national institutes, of one kind or another, concerned with preserving films, recording film history, encouraging the production of newsreels and short films, advancing loans to feature films, promoting experiment, training and distribution outside the film industry. These bodies are helped by the central governments - either directly or by the proceeds of a tax levied on commercial ticket sales - and, in some countries, by the national cultural offices. In France and Sweden, the film institutes come under the umbrella of the Ministries of Culture, but enjoy a degree of automony. The British Film Institute is subsidised not by the Arts Council - but by the Department of Education, while the Ministry of Trade is responsible for another independent body, the National Film Finance Corporation, which, with the help of government loans, advances capital to feature film-makers. In Holland, the Ministry of Culture gives annual production awards, while the government subsidises a production fund comparable to Britain's. The American Film Institute is aided by an annual grant from the NEA, which helped to establish it, and which also, through its Public Media Programme, encourages regional film centres, promotes film education, and attempts to improve the quality of art films in cinema programmes.

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All these organisations perform valuable cultural services, yet their activities scarcely touch the bulk of the cinema-going public, which has steadily declined in the last 25 years and is coming more to resemble the concert audience, but is still vastly bigger than the audiences for opera, ballet, music, and theatre. Discussions at Dartington touched mainly on the participation of citizens in film-making - emphasising the value of the process, rather than the product - and left aside the knottier questions.

In television and radio, the central fact is that both in Europe and the USA, the national cultural offices seem to have no function except that of persuasion. In France and Sweden, television and radio agencies are under direct, centralised state control quite apart from the national cultural offices. There is no competitive commercial or regionalised activity. The use of cable TV, and other public communications systems, is also a state monopoly, and the outlook for decentralisation appears to be misty. Sweden is exploring new ways of collaboration between cultural committees. The French, too, have put this kind of working liaison high on their list of priorities. But these are still prospects, not practices. In the UK a mixed economy provides greater competition and regional devolution, with 15 commercial TV companies and the BBC, and in radio, the spread of local BBC stations, with the imminent advent of local commercial radio. Unofficial contacts are maintained between the Arts Council and the BBC in London, and between regional arts associations and TV centres outside the capital, but there are no formal links between the cultural agencies and the broadcasting systems. In the USA, where TV is still dominated by 3 national commercial networks, public broadcasting has grown steadily in the past decade. It has been helped not only by the state education departments and university boards, but by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a government chartered and funded corporation that gives annual grants to public television stations throughout the country. Recently the NEA's Public Media Programme has collaborated with CPB to produce programmes for the PBS networks. Moreover the spread of multi-channel cable TV networks in new towns, cities and suburban areas, seems to hold out high hopes: by law, 2 out of a minimum of 20 channels must now be "public access", and these channels, as was clear at Dartington, may be used to show films and programmes reflecting local cultural and creative activity, linking TV with the life of the community as a decentralising force.

What was not clear at Dartington was how American experience of new technology could, for all its stimulating euphoria, be helpful in the immediate future to European cultural agencies and their staff, faced, as they are, by problems of finance, of centralised media control, and, not least, of public attitude, especially inside the world of the arts. For in marked contrast to the American faith in the open possibilities that changing technology offers for human progress, there is still, it seems, a European suspicion of and contempt for "gadgetry". Yet without the help of such technology, can the cultural agencies of Europe hope to counter, successfully, the still-growing influence of the mass media and hence the centralisation of taste, opinion and entertainment?

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Behind the discussions at Dartington, I thought I could hear faint echoes of the old "Raise v Spread" debate, which reverberated through the early history of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Should state money, centralised guidance and administrative effort be devoted to the raising of artistic standards and appreciation, along the line of the maxim "few, but roses"? Or should it be invested in multiplying the audience for the arts, more and broader culture, making the loaves and fishes go round? In theory, there is no conflict - the Arts Council was committed both to raising and spreading. However, when a choice has had to be made, national cultural offices have tended to concentrate on subsidising the pursuit of excellence in central or focal institutions and companies. This is not surprising, nor is resistance to the potential threat of radical decentralisation to the maintenance of standards, and at Dartington there was scant support for measures that might destroy the major organisations and companies. Yet at the same time the consensus view was that in accelerating the spread of culture by decentralisation, the old concern with aesthetic standards was anachronistic as a priority at local levels.

A main theme of the seminar stressed the importance of participation, the culture of the doer rather than of the spectator. In each countr a search is going on for ways to bring ordinary people together in cultural activities that go well beyond such traditional participatory forms as the choral society and the drama group. It is the collaborative process, not the artistic product, that is seen as supremely valuable by many activists. In Sweden, indeed, "coming together" - 'samvaro dagar' - is the name given to experimental leisure activities among people at the bottom of the social scale, that centre in ordinary rooms in city suburbs and are stimulated by voluntary workers from Stockholm. In such a social context, the majority of Dartington seminarists thought that the traditional sheep-and-goats division between professional and amateur is both out of date and irrelevant: what matters is not who gives and who receives but the quality of the experience itself, the shared creative activity. Art for life's sake, in fact. "To be recognised for doing something, even if you do it poorly", said Richard Loveless, "is better than not to be recognised at all." Dartington activists pointed to the futility of decentralising culture to those who already want it. They were concerned not so much with the extension and duplication of institutions and experiences taken for granted at the centre, but rather with the evolution and use of new institutions, methods of collaboration, administrative mixes and forms of cultural expression, notably through the use of new technology.

Looking ahead, there appears to be a noticeable trend in administrative thinking away from ambitious, expensive, multi-purpose cultural centres along the lines of the Maisons de Culture. In France itself less elaborate maisons are favoured, and the centres of cultural animation now spreading through the regions

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may have no permanent headquarters or auditoria. In Sweden, although people's houses are still planned, there is a movement towards smaller, low-cost decentralised projects involving the conversion of suitable buildings and the erection of temporary, inflatable structures in suburban areas. In the USA, where over 50 major cultural centres have been built in the last 20 years, experiments are afoot to convert cinemas and shops in city centres, and a law has been proposed that would permit conversion of unused railroad stations to cultural purposes. One example is a Brooklyn automobile showroom and neighbouring pool-room, which have been converted at low cost into MUSE, a prize-winning children's museum. In Britain, while the building of new civic theatres and centres continues, village halls, pubs, schools and community centres are used by regional arts associations and local arts centres. "One advantage of the decline in the Christian tradition", said Graham Beynon, "is the increasing number of churches available for cultural purposes".

All of this, it seems to me, reflects a general international trend - particularly visible in the use of schools and colleges after hours - toward changing the conventional idea that culture is an activity apart in a place apart, the notion that art can be seen only in a gallery and drama only in a playhouse. While arts events continue to be concentrated in traditional showplaces and while there is still a shortage of such facilities, there is a widespread search nevertheless, for ways of taking creative activity and artistic experience outside the auditoria to the majority of the public that never goes inside such buildings. Examples of such enterprise given at Dartington included art exhibitions and string quartet recitals in a Paris metro, a concert given in a Rotterdam railway station, the use of a fire engine to draw crowds to a ballet event which began with dancing in the street, travelling art buses in Britain, and, as an extreme, the American Art Train financed by the Michigan State Arts Council, a 6-carriage expedition that moves around the state (and now across the country) and attracts an average 1,000 people a day. Bristling with technology, it includes a gallery, a studio, an artist in "residence", an exhibition of local products, an exhibition on the environment, and assorted cultural experiences of a kinetic and kinaesthetic nature. 80 cities are on the waiting list. These alternatives to architecture do not mean that architecture is no longer needed, but they do herald change. "The modern arts centre", Bill Lacy said, "ought to look unfinished". To meet the need for adaptability, the programme should come first: "until you know the programme requirements, you can't get the new architectural forms".

There was, above all, a disposition at Dartington to question the ability of established major institutions to evolve new forms and functions. National cultural offices have hitherto, Theo van Velsen said, generally responded to demand, rather than taking the initiative. But it might be argued that more effective centralisation is needed before decentralisation can work. In that case, we will need a widespread incidence of what Anthony Keller called "decentralisation in spirit".

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Meanwhile, what kind of practical help do local enterprises need from the national centre. David Kirkham supplied a helpfully succinct list which included:

1. Giving and lending money, for music stands, say, or underwriting a loss on a theatrical production.

2. Giving premises, or intervening to secure their use for part-time cultural work.

3. Helping professional participation, by paying the fees of soloists in choral society rehearsals and concerts, for example.

4. Giving professional advice and encouragement in administrative, social and artistic matters.

5. Subsidising the organisation of education in courses and classes, in liaison with local cultural groups.

6. Helping to reduce or remove restriction, for instance, in the over rigid application of trade union rules.

7. Giving a stimulus to the area as a whole by widespread, co-operative social and economic measures.

Yet Kirkham also insisted "the less help, the better", a brave sentiment not generally endorsed. Richard Loveless observed, however, that local centres should not depend on governmental aid: "If the local community doesn't sustain you, then you shouldn't be there". In self help, as well as in mobilising help from other sources, the role of the animateur is clearly indispensable. David Kirkham described him as a "secret agent in the field". A great deal also depends upon the personality of the man-in-office, regionally or centrally, and that it should be decisive for decentralised enterprises to get the right man in the right job at the right time was, I thought, stressed more by the Americans and the British than by some other Europeans, who showed a disposition to put their trust in matching the right system and the correct theory.

Yet for both the central administrator and local activist, programmes must not only be successful but be seen to be successful, and soon. Anthony Keller rightly pointed out the dangers of insisting that the results of creative activity be instantly measurable. The national cultural offices' expectation of success may, he suggested, be on too short-term a scale, while the effect of programmes like artists in schools may take a generation to filter through cultural inertia and mass media kitsch. Yet it is plainly unrealistic to suppose that ministers of culture and directors of arts councils can safely look to posterity to validate their budgets. They need

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at least to know that local enterprises will elicit local support beyond that of the addicted arts elite. One general formula generally approved at Dartington was to earmark a percentage of the national cultural budget, say 1%, for experiment. Immediately verifiable results would not be expected. This form of spending is already practised ad hoc in Holland and the UK, though sometimes camouflaged in the accounts.

Another need, the importance of which was generally endorsed by the seminar, is for an expansion and co-ordination of research. Only France and Holland, as yet, have fully staffed research offices with continuous programmes. Yet if cultural trends are to be translated into political terms, then figures as well as faith, charts as well as charisma, are necessary. Carl-Erick Virdebrant urged the initiation of extensive comparative analyses of what is happening now in cultural decentralisation and what is planned for the future.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Many more important questions, large and small, were left hanging in the air at Dartington: some, indeed, could barely be adumbrated, let alone answered, within the crowded 4-day agenda. Yet some are, I think, worth listing here if only because they must surely be grappled with, country by country, if cultural decentralisation is to have any meaning during the 1970s.

1. How far should, can and do artists participate in organisational decision-making at central, regional and local levels? National evidence here appeared to be more than usually divergent and vague. My own impression was that although artists everywhere contribute to the decisions of arts advisory panels, their role in cultural machinery is secondary. The majority of people at the seminar agreed with Michael Straight that although the artist's voice should always be heard in matters of aesthetics, his function in administrative decisions is of limited value. But isn't this a kind of apartheid, to be viewed as a temporary (and undesirable) phenomenon?

2. How should the boards of local and regional enterprises be constituted? By central selection, or local self generation? Should producers or consumers be in the majority? Should the members be delegates of organisations, representatives of the community, or both? How big and how eclectic can these boards and councils afford to be? Is there not a numerical limit to their operational efficiency, as a fount of wisdom, if not as a source of power?

3. How are local organisations to be staffed? Can national and regional cultural centres continue to depend on unpaid and underpaid activists? When the fashions of involvement ebb away and there comes a flood tide of local consolidation, where are flexible, dedicated workers to be recruited and trained? Already the institutions of the performing arts are, in effect, heavily subsidised by underpaid actors and musicians.

4. How are libraries to be used as agencies of local creative activity? Whereas in many countries their role is still primarily educational, in the UK, which has the biggest public library system in the world, the cultural range of library activities is steadily expanding. Apart from lending books, the library may also be - we heard at Dartington - a place for exhibitions, plays, lectures, concerts, discussion groups, borrowing paintings, LPs and cassettes, and creative activity in general, even, as in Holland, a place where authors bring their own unpublished works for circulation, a kind of municipal samizdat.

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5. How far can local cultural traditions be used in local programming, and to what extent, indeed, do such traditions exist? Are they now no more, as was suggested at Dartington, than watching television or cleaning the car on Sunday? Or are there still persistent grass roots phenomena, such as pigeon fancying in the North of England and canoe racing in Guam, which need only stimulation rather than exhumation? Is there not a place for new "subcultures" - of motor bikes and progressive pop, say - as well as old ceremonies and rituals: not only the recording of old folk songs, but the encouragement of new ones, the evolution of new local technology beside the preservation of old handicrafts? Can such activities keep their local value if they appear on the agenda of a national tourist board, however useful may be the subsidies and the revenue that tourism brings?

6. Should touring by major arts institutions continue to be a pillar of the national cultural offices' policies, when it can, generally, reach only a tiny fraction of the population in a few major centres? When its steeply rising cost demands a proportionately bigger share of the overall cultural budget? And when its effect on the theatre companies and orchestras concerned is often damaging, not least to the exemplary standards they are meant to demonstrate?

7. What is the future role outside the USA of private finance, from industry, commerce, charitable trusts and individual patrons, in the launching and support of local and regional activity? And what possibilities are there to extend this private partnership in cultural decentralisation by governmental encouragement, through tax concessions, for instance?

8. Are the enthusiasts of cultural decentralisation swimming against the tide, by striving towards smaller units when the overall trend of national life in most countries seems to be moving steadily in the opposite direction? If they <u>are</u> swimming against the tide, is that not an increasingly necessary activity? Or is the tide, in fact, turning?

9. How far can arts administrators afford to turn their backs on majority culture and the mass media? "We know what the majority want", as one activist declared at Dartington, meaning television soap opera, non-stop pop on the radio and violent porn in the cinema, "and we're not going to support it". Graham Beynon said, "We'give what we have to give to those who are prepared to <u>think</u>", and - Anthony Keller added - "prepared to <u>feel</u>". Is this "elitism", or inevitable selectivity? To what extent should and can the Trojan Horse tactic be employed, pending the widespread local use of cable TV, cassettes, video tape, and other decentralising technology?

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10. Only Theo van Velsen referred to the intransigent privateness of many contemporary artists, notably in literature, music and the visual arts, and to the chasm between artist and public, which has probably never been wider. When so many artists reject communication with society as a priority, or even as a possibility, should decentralised cultural organisations be concerned only with instant communicators and performers, leaving the avant-garde to the mercy of market forces, private foundations and the national cultural offices? Or can the chasm be bridged, by making the avant-garde an indistinguishable part of the performing arts institutions?

11. The biggest question of all - at the heart of the matter for some at Dartington, while to others it was little more than a vast rhetorical question - was raised by Adrian van der Staay: is real cultural change possible without social and political change? And this implies a supplementary question: is the attempt at cultural change, in decentralisation, no more than a substitute for social and political change, an attempt to divert or postpone that change by wide distribution of therapy and transquillisers? Or can cultural decentralisation and analysis, become a force to encourage social and political change?

These questions were left undiscussed for good reasons: apart from the seminar's restriction of time, it seemed clear that there are kinds of cultural and creative activity that are probably already transforming society. These unseen forces are part of the rapidly accelerating process of peaceful, democratic change, spurred on by technological innovation and socio-economic pressure. If we could see where we are, let alone where we have been, we might know better where we are going.

A large vision was opened at Dartington: of ways to use the past in order to achieve a better understanding of the present and a better control of the future. "The creative fulfilment of the maximum number of individuals" implies not only ways of presenting works of art to a majority audience but also ways of creating a new relationship with your society, your region, your neighbourhood, and, perhaps, yourself. If one thinks mainly or exclusively in terms of central leadership, education and subsidy, then failure to animate the majority may quickly breed pessimism: that all-too-ready disposition to indict the majority of apathy and write off a generation. Yet if one looks at cultural patterns from below, from the perspective shared by Dartington, it appears clearly that apathy may be the result of long traditions of neglect, injustice, under-privilege, and cultural malnutrition. The separation of the arts from the rest of culture has been reinforced by too frequent a dismissal of the value and significance of other things that ordinary people like to do. Underlying the seminar's technical discussions, it seemed to me, there was a breadth and simplicity of vision that reminded me of a passage in W H Mallock's The New Republic: "It is with the life about us that all our concern lies, and culture's double end is simply this: to make us appreciate that life, and to make that life worth living".

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